

VZCZCXRO9545
OO RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHHI #0451/01 0671048
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 081048Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4851
INFO RUEHZS/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH PRIORITY 2721
RHEHNSC/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 000451

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

FOR EAP/MLS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/08/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: POLITICAL PRISONER PHAN VAN BAN CONFIRMS DESIRE
FOR RELEASE TO THE UNITED STATES

REF: A. SECSTATE 27567

[1](#)B. HANOI 407

HANOI 00000451 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador Michael W. Marine, under E.O. 12958, Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) In a March 8 meeting with the Ambassador at Nam Ha Prison in Ha Nam Province, south of Hanoi, prisoner of conscience Phan Van Ban expressed his desire to reunite with his family in the United States if released from prison. The Ambassador passed on a letter to Ban from his son and discussed his health with him. Ban has several medical conditions, but these do not appear to affect his ability to travel. Ban was lucid and alert throughout his meeting with the Ambassador and did not appear under duress. Cooperation from the Prison Commander and his deputies was good. The Ambassador told Ban that, given his desire to go to the United States, Embassy staff would now proceed with formal steps with the relevant GVN authorities to bring about his release and be back in touch with him soon. End Summary.

Ambassador Meets Ban in Nam Ha Prison

[1](#)2. (C) On March 8, the Ambassador, accompanied by Poloff and FSN interpreter, traveled to Nam Ha Prison in Ba Sao Township, Ha Nam Province (approximately 85 kilometers directly south of Hanoi) to visit long-standing political prisoner Phan Van Ban. The Ambassador held a 30-minute discussion with Ban, in a large conference room with several prison officials in attendance, and handed him a one-page letter from his son in the United States, Phan Van Vinh (aka "Vinh Phan"). The Ministry of Public Security (MPS) Prison Commander (Warden) Dzuong Duc Thang and several subordinates were cordial in receiving the Ambassador and cooperative at all times in facilitating the meeting. (Surprisingly, prison officials did not request to preview the letter Ban received from his son.) The Commander expressed their honor in hosting the Ambassador. After asking permission from the Ambassador, several prison officials videotaped and photographed the entire proceeding. Ban did not appear under duress in speaking and answering questions. (Note: This meeting was arranged pursuant to a request of Secretary Rice to Vietnamese leaders that the Ambassador be permitted to visit Ban to check on his health condition. The GVN allowed the visit after deciding that it was ready to release Ban on the condition that he leave Vietnam for the United States.

The main objective of the Ambassador's call thus became to determine whether Ban was willing to leave. End Note.)

Introductory Discussion with MPS Prison Commander

13. (C) Before Ban was brought into the room, Prison Commander Thang told the Ambassador that Nam Ha prison was a large facility with a total of 500 staff. (Note. Accompanying FSN Interpreter had been to this prison two years prior with U.S. Senator Brownback visiting Catholic priest and political dissident Nguyen Van Ly and also in 1995 visiting an AmCit prisoner. On both occasions, the atmosphere was tense. End note.) Upon question, Thang told the Ambassador that he was "not sure" if prisoner Ban was aware of discussions with the USG about this potential release and travel to the United States. He also could not tell us what he thought Ban's "aspirations" were. According to Thang, Ban is 70 years old and has been incarcerated for 22 years, during which he has been "frequently visited" by relatives. Thang said that Ban "had not been a good prisoner" in the past but that "in recent years" he had come to an understanding of his violations of the law and had "become a good prisoner." Thang told us that Ban had "old age-related" health problems and some "digestive problems."

Discussion between Ambassador and Phan Van Ban

14. (C) The Ambassador told Ban that he was at the prison on behalf of his son, Phan Van Vinh, who had been working for several years with the USG to obtain his release. According to Ban, he has not had any contact with his son. The Ambassador presented to Ban his son's letter, which Ban read intently. The Ambassador asked Ban if he were willing to go to the United States to live with his son if the USG could arrange it. Ban hesitated a minute and then responded that to reunite with his wife, Huynh Thi Lanh, and his son in the

HANOI 00000451 002.2 OF 002

United States would be the "most sacred and happiest thing" he could think about. He told the Ambassador that he is ready to go to the United States and thanked the USG, the U.S. Embassy and the Ambassador for the concerted effort and attention to his case.

15. (C) The Ambassador explained that further formal steps would now need to be taken, involving cooperation from the GVN and prison authorities, but that he hoped these steps could be taken quickly. The Ambassador also expressed hope that the prison staff would keep Ban appraised of developments and told Ban that Embassy staff would be in touch with him again soon, hopefully next week. The Ambassador asked Ban if he had any message for his wife and son. Ban said "of course, please tell them I am very happy to be sponsored by them. This is great. I look forward to seeing them and send my best regards and wishes." Ban went on to state that he was "very moved" by the attention of the Embassy and Ambassador Marine to his case and the possibility of reuniting with his family in the United States.

16. (SBU) In response to the Ambassador's question, Ban said he shares a cell with another prisoner. He has no possessions at the prison to take to the United States. He has few clothes and needs clothes and shoes.

17. (C) After the meeting concluded, Prison Commander Thang thanked the Ambassador for his visit and told the Ambassador "well, now you see with your own eyes prisoner Ban's aspirations." He told the Ambassador that he would have to work with national-level authorities in order for him to get his orders toward any possible release. The Ambassador told Thang that he fully understood the need for formalities and that he would be meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Khiem during his previously scheduled March 9 meeting.

Ban's Medical Condition

18. (C) Ban told the Ambassador that due to his age he has "a lot of" health problems and some "bad conditions." He specified to us: heart disease, kidney problems, asthma, rheumatism and some difficulties with urination. He also told us that he is slightly hard of hearing so we spoke in an elevated voice to him, which was sufficient for his comprehension. According to Ban, he receives "injections" from the prison doctor every two weeks; however, last week they started giving him "daily injections." It was not made clear to us what kind of medication these injections are. The Prison Commander pledged to provide documentation from the prison doctor on Ban's full health condition and medications upon release.

MARINE